

# COACHECast // S2 EP001 - Dawn Pratsch-Prince

## // Intro

**Todd:** Hi everyone, I'm Dr. Todd Benson and you're listening to COACHECast. Today, I'm thrilled to be speaking with Iowa State University's Associate Provost for Faculty, Dawn Brash Prince.

**Dawn:** I learned that pretty quickly that to be successful and convincing, I need to have that data behind me.

Institutions need not just policies that address bullying behavior, but they need to have the will to address that kind of behavior.

We can hire fantastic representative faculty from all 50 states, from all demographics, but if we can't retain them then our efforts are pointless.

**Todd:** Stay tuned.

## // Main Chat //

**Todd:** Welcome to Season 2 of COACHECast, brought to you by the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education, or COACHE for short. We're a research practice partnership based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Again, I'm Dr. Todd Benson, Executive Director of COACHE, and I'm thrilled to be in the host seat for Season 2 of COACHECast.

Each episode, we're going to be joined by guests from across the higher education sector as we explore the faculty experience and leadership in higher education

Today I'm delighted to welcome Dr. Dawn Brash Prince. Now, Dawn is the Associate Provost for Faculty and Professor of Spanish at Iowa State University. She's also co founder of the Committee on Faculty Affairs at the Association of Public and Land grant Universities. Welcome Dawn.

**Dawn:** Thank you for having me, Todd.

**Todd:** To kick us off, you know, when you started in the role of Associate Provost for Faculty, Associate Provost positions were less common than they are now, and I'd love to hear more about your career journey and ultimately how you came into that role.

**Dawn:** Sure. I came to Iowa State, this is my first academic position, faculty position. And I quickly realized as a faculty member that I was interested in administration because I had the notion that I could make change and impact the institution. I became a department chair, because I had a vision for my department and a big role of the department chair is hiring faculty, mentoring faculty, advancing and promoting faculty, and supporting them in general. So I had an opportunity after that chair role to move on to the college level and I became an Associate dean for a three year period, and I was the first Associate Dean in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences that had as part of their portfolio, faculty development and faculty recognition.

And so it was an opportunity to take what I had learned as chair and expand it to a college of 22 different departments, arts and sciences. And that was a wonderful learning experience and I know that the programming I developed in that role had an impact on the faculty, in the college, their success. And so when the opportunity to move into the provost office came up or the opportunity to apply for that position, I had the experience and I thought, well, this would take it to the next university wide level.

I was successful in being hired into the position of associate provost, which is more complex, obviously, than working in a department or a college. I had to learn vet med. I had to learn college of design, college of business, but I was able to build on my prior experience in the realm of faculty development and I think in my fourteen years as associate provost, I've really advanced the mission of faculty success, as we call it here at this institution.

**Todd:** Tell me, when you're department chair, you're still really part of the department and then as you transition and you move up, you become more administrator than faculty. And that's an interesting transition for a lot of folks who came in thinking they were just going to study their discipline for their whole career and found an opportunity to forward the mission of a university that's not just as a faculty member.

**Dawn:** When you made the decision to apply, how did you work through the feelings of letting go of your discipline? You're absolutely right. When you're a department chair you can maybe balance the teaching, the research, and the administrative work. But as you move up the ladder, so to speak, move into a

broader institutional role, it becomes more and more challenging to carve out time, to really dedicate yourself and provide quality teaching and engage in quality research, at least for me. And then if you have a personal life, which most of us do, how do you account for time for that?

So you do have to make a decision to go down one path or go down the other.

I found that the work that I do is almost human resources type work. I'm working with personnel. The issues that come up in this kind of sphere of work is there's fires, there's urgent matters, there's fast response needed, and that requires attention, immediate attention. And that doesn't always interplay well with, three or four hours dedicated to reading or focus time on class prep or time in the classroom.

When you're working with people and your job is people, you need to be sure that you're present, you're available. you can dedicate attention and be engaged. And so yes, you do have to make that decision to say, okay, I'm going to go down this administrative path, which is what I did.

**Todd:** I think all that great background to talk about your involvement with APLU's Committee on Faculty Affairs. You played a key role in the founding of the CFA, and for those listeners who don't know, could you talk a little bit about what it does and what drove you to help in its development?

**Dawn:** Sure. So the Committee on Faculty Affairs is a committee under the umbrella of the APLU, the Association for Public Land Grant Universities. And it is a community of practice, of individuals at the institutional level who work in the realm of faculty affairs, faculty success, faculty development, call it what you wish, but in that range of work.

And actually I would say, Todd, that the Committee on Faculty Affairs really had its roots in COACHE, because I met, a colleague, Jack Finney, former vice provost at Virginia Tech, at the 2012 COACHE workshop, and engage in a conversation with him about, hey, where's our community? Where are the conferences for individuals working in Faculty Affairs? Where are the opportunities for professional development in Faculty Affairs? Apart from the work of COACHE, there was nothing. And as I'm sure our listeners understand, there's a whole discipline called Student Affairs. You can get a PhD in Student Affairs.

There's nothing in Faculty Affairs or Faculty Development. There's no discipline. I think it's growing, but at the time there wasn't. And so, Jack and I

thought about and tried to develop a list, a community, but we were both very engaged full time in our jobs, and that just didn't pan out.

It wasn't until 2016 at an APLU conference meeting that we met up with Ellen Granberg. A former, or a colleague with a connection to APLU, that we decided that in 2017 we'd try to launch a meeting of individuals working in this...

**Todd:** Just a conversation, right?

**Dawn:** Yeah. So we had a conversation, And we had a lunch. We put out an offer for anybody that wanted to join us for lunch and we were shocked that we had, I think, 12, 13 people that joined an informal lunch meeting to talk about how to, not organize, but how to build a community of practice. And so from there it's just grown.

**Todd:** And if I remember correctly back then, a lot of the conversations were just about what is in your portfolio of responsibilities because everybody was so different. and it's still probably the case now, but we've kind offigured out how to be comfortable with that.

**Dawn:** Yes, but now we have through the work of the Committee on Faculty Affairs, which is embedded in the APLU because we, all those that were organizing it felt that having some type of organizational structure into which we could plug our efforts made sense. APLU has been extremely supportive of our efforts and we've worked with them on offering sessions at the annual APLU meeting. We have a summer workshop on faculty affairs, usually hosted in May. And it's a great opportunity for individuals, as you said, with very varying portfolios to get together, share best practices and be welcoming community for people who are new to the discipline as well.

**Todd:** Let's talk a little bit more about the Committee on Faculty Affairs. Early on it was like, what are your responsibilities versus folks at other institutions and that sort of thing.

But what do you see as the issues that are popping up now, both in higher ed as well as in faculty affairs and faculty leadership? And how has the committee evolved since 2016? What's different now?

**Dawn:** We survived COVID. So that was a big, shock and challenge for all of us. You know, we have a listserv, faculty success listserv that allows individuals with our portfolios, faculty affairs professionals to communicate and share updates, best practices, ask questions. During COVID, and this has continued

on, we organized huddles, webinars, to talk about the urgent updates that were happening during COVID. How were different institutions dealing with the crisis of the moment? And those were extremely important, I think influential and really kept us connected. Some of the issues that I see during COVID was supporting faculty and ensuring that our new faculty didn't get lost in the confusion of COVID.

Contingent faculty is a big topic. So non tenure track faculty who are increasingly becoming, almost a majority in the profession. How are institutions supporting these individuals are so vital to everything that we do in higher education. DEI, as you can imagine, in many of our states is just a huge challenge.

Bans on DEI, different limits on DEI, and this does impact our efforts to recruit and retain excellent faculty. So I think that is another strand that we're seeing right now. And certainly academic freedom, of speech. Those issues, I think are national issues that many institutions are trying to clarify and navigate.

**Todd:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it certainly hasn't gotten any easier.

**Dawn:** No, it has not. We thought COVID was, okay, the pinnacle of challenges, but we are continued to face challenges every semester, different things pop up, which is why having this community of practice is so vital, so we stay connected. So we don't feel isolated. We have peers that we can learn from and share with.

**Todd:** Absolutely, and I have to just put in an extra little plug for the Listserv. It is the most organized Listserv I've ever participated in.

**Dawn:** Oh, wow!

**Todd:** Somebody floats a question in the morning, and by the afternoon you've got 25 responses that somebody's collated and alphabetized for you. You can go in there and ask any questions, and correct me if I'm wrong, but that's really open to pretty much anyone. It doesn't just have to be public universities, right?

**Dawn:** Yes. So we started that, and it is open to all, to anybody. Mostly it's at the university level or college level, individuals who are involved in faculty professional development, faculty affairs. So it's a mixture of individuals, but yes, public, private, small, large, all types of institutions.

**Todd:** If you're a fan of listservs, this is the best one ever, so... You talked a little bit about some of the issues that you're all facing now, but I wanted to bring up one other thing that you mentioned in an earlier conversation around faculty bullying. And that it's really a difficult issue being faced by a lot of institutions and I'm curious to know, how are you working towards addressing that or how can leaders generally think about that challenge?

**Dawn:** Right. Bullying is an issue. Some institutions call it, a lack of civility. We try to steer away from the word collegiality, because that's a hot topic. But I think in many organizations in higher education, there's a sense that we can't do anything about it.

We tolerate it. In the guise of, well, it's academic freedom.

You can stand up in a faculty meeting and shout your colleagues down and people will say, well, that's my academic freedom. And so I think that we have allowed, we as institutions have allowed that kind of harassing behavior, demeaning behavior to exist, and we have not called it out.

Institutions need not just policies that address bullying behavior, but they need a willingness to, and support for the department chairs and others that have to really are in the weeds and have to manage it, they need to have the will to address that kind of behavior. Even if it takes, you know, more than one conversation to address it.

So at our institution, we have a policy in our faculty handbook and we try to raise awareness of this policy with our faculty and encourage people to not tolerate that type of behavior. I think the academy itself needs to make it very clear that, tenure does not mean protection, for individuals who engage in that kind of intimidation, bullying, demeaning behavior.

I think we all have seen it, but we have to have the will to stand up to it and I think that's a journey that we're on now.

**Todd:** Yeah. Yeah. I think that a lot of institutions are, and part of it's the academic freedom issue, part of it's the litigious nature of these things, which we could have a whole other podcast on.

What are the other skills you had to learn to become. Who you are, a lawyer, accountant....

**Dawn:** Absolutely. I was just before this podcast interviewing a candidate for a leadership position here, and my message to them was, you work with us, we provide support in the office of the associate provost for faculty. We will have your back if you work with us through these sometimes grueling processes. And I think that's the message that we really need to deliver. Department chairs, associate deans are not out there on their own. We're here with them and we're going to support them, navigating some of these less pleasant situations.

**Todd:** Yeah. The awkward conversations are the hardest to have.

**Dawn:** Oh, yes.

**Todd:** That's why they're awkward, But no, I do hear so many more institutions and folks like you who are trying to navigate that issue. But it's just, it's very sensitive. And I think the other part of it is, the first rule of faculty conduct is you can't talk to anybody else about faculty conduct.

How do you, you know, share ideas and thoughts and processes that allow you to, expand your thinking about a very sensitive topic while not dealing with issues of confidentiality and that sort of thing.

**Dawn:** Right, and I think this is where having a solid relationship with your institution's general counsel office, your office of equal opportunity, your human resources office, and I know every institution is organized differently, but having those trusting partnerships is really critical to being able to make progress on this issue of just unacceptable conduct and bullying behavior.

**Todd:** So one of the things I was thinking about, because you've been in your role, I think you said 14 years?

**Dawn:** Yes.

**Todd:** So you've seen a few provosts and presidents in your time. Talk a little bit about your experience working with different management styles. Are there things that you've picked up over time or processes that you found useful in maximizing your relationship with sometimes very different types of people?

**Dawn:** Certainly, and we're in a provost search right now and the plan is to have a new provost in place in the coming months, and so I'll be gearing up for yet another change. You have to have, as an associate provost or vice provost, you have to have a solid relationship with your provost. And I see my job is to serve the provost, their vision, their priorities, in the realm of faculty that's my charge.

And so understanding the priorities and the vision of the provost, or if you're an associate dean with your dean, whomever you're working for and with. And understanding their communication preferences, but having regular communication with that individual is absolutely necessary in order to carry out the mission that they see, and to also develop trust in the relationship.

You cannot be successful in your work if you don't have a trusting relationship with the individual you're working with.

I've worked for provosts who want a lot of narrative and I've worked for provosts who want the high level bullet points, concise communication. And so I need to, I've learned that I need to adapt to those different styles.

What do they want to weigh in on and what are they okay delegating to you? I think that's also very critical so that you're not spending time bringing to them issues that they fully trust you to handle. I also know that leaders, whether it's a chair, dean, or provost, they don't like surprises. So while I can spend my time communicating with faculty, with staff, with our deans, I need to keep my provost in the loop on things that may flare up that I think that they need to be aware of, the things that could potentially fall into the president's lap for some reason.

And one thing that I've learned here is that when you're at the provost level, anything I say, anything I do.

**Todd:** Mm hmm.

**Dawn:** is perceived as representing the provost's office. And even though I think I am saying something or doing something as in my capacity as a faculty member, I'm really representing the provost's office.

So that's, I think, a big switch for some of us. And you have to be very mindful of that. You need to be very careful as well, what you put into writing and what you commit to. I think those are strategies and reminders for anybody that's in a senior leadership position, but you don't think of those things when you're a faculty member.

That's, I think, a really fascinating point to think about is just, getting comfortable with those varying styles, but also knowing that their style might not be the same as yours, your leader, your provost. And so, there is this kind of I think, challenge to, adapting and clearly you figured that out, because you've been in the role for a while. The work is the work, but the individuals you have

to work with and how you navigate and negotiate are different with different leaders. But I think the key takeaway is if you're in an associate provost or vice provost role, you're really in support of the provost. And so individuals need to, in my opinion, reconcile with that and recognize what their role is and adapt.

**Todd:** We talked about this a little bit earlier, but I wanna circle back to it to give it a little bit more attention. Part of your role at Iowa State is to lead the institution's faculty related DEI efforts. What have you learned about that experience in this space and maybe thinking about how that's changed over the last few years?

Because obviously there's, especially at public institutions, it's been a real conversation, I'll say, about DEI and how colleges and universities think about it.

**Dawn:** Certainly, Part of my responsibility, part of my portfolio, is hiring excellent faculty and retaining those excellent faculty. And those are challenging charges, in a time when I would say DEI is under attack in many places and in many states. Iowa is no exception.

So in our state right now, there's legislation being passed that will limit our ability to have a DEI office, to have specific, DEI functions at the institution.

Those are structural changes, but the institution is still committed to hiring the best faculty that we can and the most diverse faculty that we can, because our students are increasingly diverse. Iowa is a fairly large state, homogeneous state with regard to population, but our student body continues to become more diverse. And so we really do need to have faculty that can work with, understand and be role models, if you will, for students. And so, being proactive about the hiring process, the recruitment process, I think is step number one, regardless of any, state concerns about, or legislation about DEI.

Lots of times departments will post a job ad, and maybe talk to some people they know and that's it. And then expect to generate this very diverse pool of applicants. And that's not realistic. We really need to go out and proactively recruit for every faculty position that we have.

I think that's a change in the Academy and we have some resources, we have best practices, but I would say that's a DEI effort. And then retaining our faculty. We can hire fantastic, representative faculty from all 50 states, from all demographics, but if we can't retain them then our efforts are pointless. And as my colleague, assistant provost for faculty success, Dr. Tara Jordan says, we

don't want to give faculty a reason to start looking for other positions. So that's where, climate, these issues that we just talked about of bullying behavior in the department, we need to address those things and be mindful of those things.

The COACHE faculty satisfaction survey has given us over years good feedback on where we need to target our efforts, in creating a culture where all faculty feel supported and welcome. So even though it's not necessarily framed as DEI, I think that recruitment and then civil climate, support for faculty leads to retention, those are two things that we can absolutely work on in our academic departments.

**Todd:** And it's just good practice. I mean, that's the thing. The efforts to, as we were talking about earlier, reduce bullying, it could be a DEI related issue, but it's also a workplace climate issue for lots of folks.

And so that's, a good opportunity actually for us to jump into another question, because you've been a COACHE partner for so long. The heart of COACHE's work is collecting good data about faculty and then analyzing it and then hopefully driving some change at each institution that participates. What I find really fun about my work is that every person in a role like yours, comes from a completely different disciplinary background. We have economists, we have artists, we have Spanish professors, and I was thinking about that in terms of you, because I would guess that your work doesn't include, or at least your original disciplinary work, didn't include combing through large swaths of quantitative data?

**Dawn:** Nope, not at all.

**Todd:** so I'm curious about that. How did you eventually become an advocate for the value of data and planning and decision making and working with faculty?

**Dawn:** So I'm a language professor and data to me is almost, is a language and it's the language that Iowa State University speaks. Our institutional name is Iowa State University of Science and Technology. So I'm working with engineers with individuals in the agricultural sciences, computer science, college of business, humanities, folks like myself make up a smaller portion of the faculty and the administration at the university.

So if I want to get a point across and I don't have data to back up my point or my argument, I'm not going to be effective. And so I learned that pretty quickly that to be, successful and convincing in the work that I'm doing, I need to have

that data behind me, supporting my arguments. Iowa State began with COACHE, I think it was 2005, 2006...

**Todd:** I think, original cohort.

**Dawn:** Yeah, and this was part of our effort, as an advanced institutional transformation, university or grant recipient, it was our way to establish a baseline data on faculty satisfaction. And you could do that anecdotally, but that is not convincing or effective.

And so I give a lot of credit to Susan Carlson, former associate provost, who moved on to work at the University of California system as associate provost for faculty. She was the one that really led us to COACHE into this data informed approach to faculty support, faculty success. And we are able to now, over the course of many years, look and track and see how our efforts in this office and in our colleges have, measured up and impacted faculty success. And the data is very useful when we're meeting with chairs and deans. We can measure progress and we have certainly seen progress.

One of the main points that we started out with was clarifying the promotion and tenure process. And I just heard yesterday at a reception for successful candidates, how consistent and organized and fair our promotion and tenure process is at the university.

The clarity of all of the materials and guidance. So that just, you know, is an anecdotal piece of evidence, but it's certainly supported by the data that we get from COACHE.

**Todd:** Well, I hope you got that on video and you can just play it on loop when you're having a bad day.

**Dawn:** I did not, but it was wonderful to hear, especially in light of, you know, we're going to be, bringing on board a new provost, will everything change? But I don't think it will because we do have a good system and our system has been informed by the feedback that we've gotten through the COACHE data.

We still have plenty of things to work on, but that's one piece of information or one area where we've been able to utilize the data to improve processes and prove faculty success.

**Todd:** That was a lot of the foundational work of COACHE was trying to understand why folks weren't making it through the tenure process. Because

back in the day when we only had junior faculty in our study. And also I just want to put in a little plug and there'll be a link to this at our COACHECast page, but Susan is actually one of our guests from season one!

**Dawn:** Oh, wonderful.

**Todd:** She talks about all the diversity work that she did in the University of California system. It's a great conversation. I hope folks enjoy it. So just to dive a little bit deeper, I'm curious when you think about the story that you try to tell with the data, how do you design the story. How do you share it out in a way that can hit all those different audiences? All those different disciplinary backgrounds or all the constituencies that need to work with supporting faculty.

**Dawn:** One of the values of the COACHE data is we can slice it and dice it according to discipline, according to rank, according to demographic. And that helps us tailor our stories for our different deans. And so, as I mentioned, assistant provost Tara Jordan meets with the deans and she's able to use the data to craft a narrative about how the different colleges, which is really where the promotion and tenure standards and processes, that's where the heart is, what subgroups, what rank of faculty are struggling with whatever it might be.

And so the ability to not just present this really high level data, but really tailor the data to fit the experience of the different colleges, the different disciplines, it's just wonderful to be able to do that. Because sometimes you present institutional data and some of the people that listen to those presentations dismiss it, because of their college or their unit is different.

Well, we have the data to show you how your unit also measures up. So they know that takes more time, but doing those kind of deeper dives with more specific analysis of the data, with each of the academic colleges and the disciplines, is very beneficial. And I think that's something that we've been doing pretty well.

**Todd:** All right. Before we wrap up, I want to ask, is there anything else that you want to promote or think about, or if folks want to meet you and ask you some questions, how would they get ahold of you?

**Dawn:** Oh, sure. People can always reach out to me via email at Iowa State University. And in fact, I do get emails occasionally from individuals who want to talk through an issue who are looking at maybe reorganizing their office.

When I came into my office, it was me and a staff member working on policy and personnel. And I have expanded that, thanks to the support of the provost, to have someone focused on, to have a team, somebody focused on faculty recognition, external recognitions. Tara Jordan, who's working on faculty development and faculty leadership programs. And she has a staff and we also have a director of faculty policy and personnel, who interfaces extensively with HR.

So that team has been great. And I'm happy to share how we got there, how we grew the office and how we demonstrate our value to the institution.

I want to put another plug in for the Committee on Faculty Affairs listserv. It is a great resource. It is [faculty-success@iastate.edu](mailto:faculty-success@iastate.edu). If you email me, I'm happy to add you to that listserv.

I also want to mention if I can one organization, Academic Impressions, who's worked with us with members of the committee on faculty affairs on building out their professional development offerings for academic leaders, department chairs. We've done some roundtables for associate provost for faculty affairs. They're just very engaged with the world of professional development and higher education. They've been a really supportive partner to us, so I want to mention them as well.

**Todd:** That's fantastic. Everybody's an ally in this work.

**Dawn:** Yeah.

## // Final question //

**Todd:** Now, to wrap up, I'd love to ask you one last question that we're asking all of our guests. As a collaborative, working to improve the faculty experience and support leaders in this effort, what should COACHE study next?

I know you've done some work on faculty governance, and I think that's a topic that is very relevant, especially in the current times. I think that is an area where COACHE can continue to, develop programming or resources, because if the faculty governance between the administration and whatever faculty body you have at your organization, if that's not a solid relationship, then things can go poorly pretty quickly.

**Dawn:** The whole issue of academic freedom and freedom of speech, it's not clear to anybody. And that is impacting, the teaching of faculty, scholarship of faculty, engagement with students. That is a real significant, new challenge that we're seeing. And I think that's an area where COACHE might be able to gather data on the faculty experience, with regard to academic freedom and freedom of speech.

And then, of course, the whole departmental climate, the bullying, policies, if there were a way to pull that topic out and do more around that, I think that would be a real contribution to the profession.

**Todd:** Fantastic.

Dawn, thank you so much once again for speaking with me today on COACHECast and for sharing your insights with us.

**Dawn:** Thank you.

**Todd:** Be sure to check out the show notes for the transcript and links to any resources that we mentioned today. Thanks for joining us.

Tune in to our next episode when we'll speak with Dr. Mark Reiger, Executive Vice President and Provost at Florida Gulf Coast University, about academic leadership.

Listen wherever you get your podcasts and be sure to follow us.

I'm Dr. Todd Benson. See you next time

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